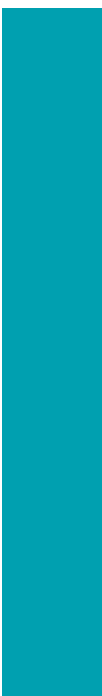
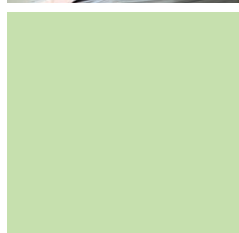
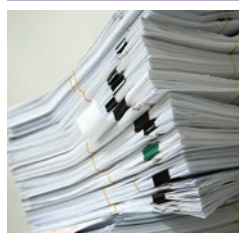
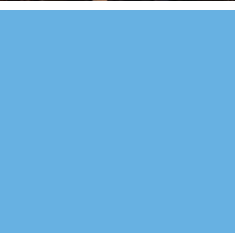
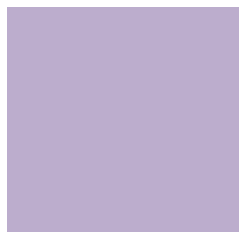
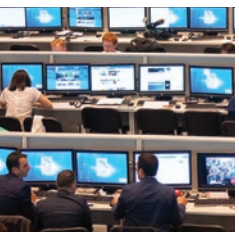


The Politics of Media Development

The Importance of Engaging Government and Civil Society

BY PAUL ROTHMAN

September 2015





ABOUT CIMA

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), at the National Endowment for Democracy, works to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of independent media development throughout the world.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations.

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Introduction

In the field of media development, the public sector is often viewed as a monolithic barrier to the development of independent and sustainable media. Although governments do frequently pervert and capture media sectors in countries around the globe, the enabling conditions under which media can achieve and maintain independence are nevertheless reliant on institutions of government. Therefore the media development community must rethink its approaches to public sector engagement in more holistic efforts to improve the environment for media systems in emerging and fragile democracies.



This paper outlines the key role of political support, the need for more nuanced understanding of political context, and how donors and implementers can more effectively engage drivers of change in the public sector to build support for media and thereby aid media development efforts.

Media development approaches espoused in this paper apply to countries where there is at least nominal space for civil society and the media to operate and where some level of engagement of public institutions is possible. Of course, highly restricted political environments in countries like China or Russia can make such an approach problematic, if not impossible, but the basic principles outlined in this paper still apply.

Time to Rethink Media Development

Although media work in the developing world has been around for many decades, the modern day field of media development emerged as a prominent force in development and democracy promotion after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the global retreat of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to a 2011 CIMA report by Ellen Hume, as the second wave of democratization swept through Eastern and Central Europe, western donors recognized the importance of the media in bringing about democratic change in the post-Soviet space. According to Hume, the United States alone “mobilized some \$600 million” worth of support to media development.¹



The media development community must understand that in today's climate media development cannot be successful through predominantly technical approaches and remedies.

Indeed, due in part to the donor focus on media throughout much the 1990s, substantial progress was made in the media systems of countries such as Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Baltic states, among others. Propagandistic state media apparatuses of the Soviet era were converted into public service broadcasters, licensing rules were loosened or disbanded altogether to foster media pluralism, state censors no longer obstructed independent broadcasts, and media reforms created enabling legal environments for media that allowed the sector to sustain itself.²

To many western observers, the second wave of democracy was unstoppable, and as other global issues captured donors' attention, funding for media development decreased significantly. As the funding disappeared, media development actors continued to focus on technical projects, training, and capacity building but paid little attention to broader national-level political contexts affecting the long-term viability of media.

Now in 2015, as democracy is in retreat in many areas of the world, media systems are crumbling under the weight of illiberal politics. The media development community must understand that in today's climate media development cannot be successful through predominantly technical approaches and remedies. Politics matter and if donors and implementers are to contribute to the strengthening of media systems, there must be greater emphasis on building a foundation of political support at the country level to provide enabling environments for media to thrive.

The Political Nature of Media Systems

Media systems are uniquely political because of the role they play as arbiters of local and national political discourse. Control over the sector holds immense value for elites who aim to further their own political or economic interests.

Indeed, the media sector is often one of the first targets of authoritarian leaders and other illiberal actors in efforts to consolidate political power.³ Russia's Putin, Hungary's Orbán, Venezuela's Chávez, and Turkey's Erdoğan have all aggressively pursued control of the media through restrictive media laws, nepotism, and crackdowns on independent media outlets.

Even in more democratic societies, the media is often closely held or captured by political elites. Not surprisingly then, the public sector and politics are perceived as a threat to media development efforts. However, the challenge for media development practitioners is that public sector support is also vital for the health and independence of the very media systems they hope to bolster. Without the enabling political conditions for the media to operate freely, media development efforts can achieve only limited success.



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Emerging Authoritarians Who Targeted National Media Systems

Viktor Orbán
HUNGARY

In 2010, his first year in power, Hungarian Prime Minister

Viktor Orbán, used his right-wing party's political strength to tighten government control of the broadcast sector, extend regulation to print and online media, undo the government's obligation to prevent media monopolies and consolidate media regulation under the supervision of a single entity, the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), whose leader is chosen by the Prime Minister for a nine-year term.⁴



Hugo Chávez
VENEZUELA

In 2004, Venezuelan President, **Hugo Chávez**, pushed through amendments to the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media (Resorte Law), which contain vaguely worded restrictions. For example, the law bans content that could "incite or promote hatred," "foment citizens' anxiety or alter public order," "disrespect authorities," "encourage assassination," or "constitute war propaganda."⁵



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
TURKEY

A few years after the 2002 election, **Recep**

Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP party began targeting media ownership in the country. The party broke up the media holdings of the Uzan and Ciner groups in 2004 and 2007 respectively. The holdings were dispersed to foreign companies and pro-government entities within Turkey. In 2008 waves of arrests of journalists began, and the AKP began blocking websites, including YouTube the following year.⁶



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The Political Case: How Independent Media Contributes to Society

- A check on corruption and misuse of national resources
- A platform for political debate and for building consensus
- A source of factual information and independent analysis that supports democratic processes and economic development
- A way to give voice and empowerment to citizens but also keep leadership better informed about effectiveness of policies

Furthermore, better understanding among media development actors of the political environment for media is crucial for another reason: Media development activities are inherently political. In fact, according to Thomas Carothers and Diane De Gramont in a 2013 article in *Foreign Policy*'s Democracy Lab, nearly all kinds of development work are political. "By its very nature, foreign aid is politically sensitive. Efforts by one country to change basic elements of life in another through injections of financial and technical resources are inherently intrusive."⁷

Although Carothers is referring to traditional "socioeconomic" sectors of development such as health and environmental conservation, this statement aptly applies to media development. Media development actors must better understand the political implications of their work in order to address one of the most important aspects of building an independent, sustainable, and effective media system in a country: the political enabling environment.

The Political Enabling Environment

Plenty of good work is being done in a wide range of areas of media development. Journalism training and support for independent media startups, incubators, media watchdog groups, and open data initiatives are some common and worthwhile endeavors being funded and implemented in emerging democracies. All of these efforts are key ingredients for the development of media in transitioning countries.

However, these efforts are often done with little or no coordination between donors and implementers, and without proper consideration of national political and economic contexts. Without sufficient understanding of the broader environment for media, these efforts will only produce limited results. Moreover, because independent journalists and the media viscerally defend their independence from governments, media development organizations often do not consider the public sector to be a viable partner in helping to effect change in the media environment.

National Leaders Who Stood Up for Media

Nelson Mandela

SOUTH AFRICA

Despite facing heated criticism from the press during his tenure, **Nelson Mandela** remained steadfast and vocal in his support for the media. “A critical, independent, and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy. The press must be free from state interference. It must have the economic strength to stand up to the blandishments of government officials. It must have sufficient independence from vested interests to be bold and inquiring without fear or favor.... It is only such a free press that can temper the appetite of any government to amass power at the expense of the citizen.”⁸



Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie

INDONESIA

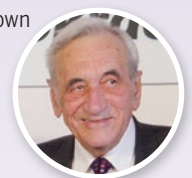
Upon assuming office in the early post-Suharto era, **President Habibie** proclaimed his commitment to journalistic autonomy by declaring that he would “...never, never tolerate the Indonesian government interfering with the press” Although he endured harsh media coverage as his presidency progressed, and publicly expressed irritation about the ‘misuse’ of press freedom, Habibie still presided over a numerous important legal amendments that protect the media.⁹



Tadeusz Mazowiecki

POLAND

What became known as “the Polish Miracle” was created by luck and good decision-making in the early days of the transition. Prime Minister **Tadeusz Mazowiecki**, one of the leaders of the Solidarity movement, was a strong believer in freedom of the press and according to Adam Michnik, got “the [Polish] government out of the newspaper business and allows foreign investors to enter the broadcast market.” This privatization of the media enabled a flourishing independent media that continues to this day. But it required a visionary leader to put media on the agenda early in the newly free Polish political environment.¹⁰



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The Three Forces of an Enabling Media Environment

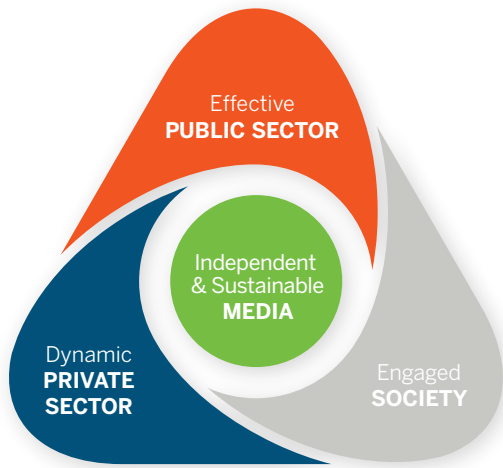


FIGURE 1: Constructive public sector influence is the result of a political culture that understands and values the pivotal role of the media. How can the donor community help local actors foster political support for independent media in developing countries?

A political enabling environment for media is typically described as the framework of laws and regulations that provide space for the media to function. Good media laws are certainly a critical backbone of an enabling media environment, but in this paper, a political enabling environment refers to expressed political support within the political leadership of a country.

Indeed political support for the media as a pillar of democratic governance is a prerequisite for the passage of laws that create a sustainable and independent media sector that contributes to the overall quality of governance. Therefore, it is important to think of the political environment and the role of the public sector as more than laws and lawmakers but the degree to which there is support among political leaders, and especially parliamentarians, for an independent media sector.

Healthy media systems require an enabling environment supported by three key forces: a dynamic private sector, an engaged society, and an effective public sector. As illustrated in FIGURE 1, the public sector plays a critical role in building an enabling media environment through the passage of supportive laws and regulations that create a fair and level playing field. Only the public sector can provide these elements of an enabling structure for media.

Furthermore, the public sector has a particularly influential role among the three elements of an enabling environment. Laws and regulations passed by public sector institutions, namely parliaments and other lawmaking bodies, directly impact the rules of the game for the private sector and civil society.

A constructive public-sector influence on a country's media environment is the result of a political leadership that understands and values the pivotal role of independent media. Therefore, because the public sector plays such an influential role in creating an enabling media environment, more emphasis should be placed on identifying and empowering local drivers of change among political institutions to help build political support for media.¹¹

Understanding Political Context for Media Development

Country-level context is a key variable for understanding the political constraints, pressures, and incentives that shape the media sector in a particular country. Without proper understanding of broader domestic context, it is difficult for external media development actors to learn why certain programmatic approaches and strategies may succeed or fail and where potentially catalytic opportunities exist.

Over the past two decades, new approaches to understanding country-level political context have become an influential force in the development community. This is particularly true across the health, environmental, and governance sectors.¹² Most of these approaches, such as the Drivers of Change (DoC) approach developed by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) or the "problem driven" political economy analysis approach developed at the World Bank, draw on principles of political-economy analysis.

According to Sue Unsworth, principal at the Policy Practice and former senior official at DFID, "Political analysis shows that political context and process is central to shaping the incentives of politicians and policymakers for or against progressive change. This directly challenges conventional donor approaches that assume the problems are primarily financial and technical."¹³ The DoC approach and other political-economy analysis strategies are meant to address a persistent challenge for development: the perceived lack of political will among local stakeholders, especially political leaders. To do so, the DoC approach focuses on instances where political institutions and leaders are driving change and where political will does exist in a country.¹⁴

The focus on identifying political will and local processes of change is meant to shift the paradigm of development assistance to approaches focused on local needs, priorities, and opportunities for change.¹⁵ Essentially, such assessment can help external actors identify how they can support indigenous processes of change rather than trying to effect change through foreign, especially developed-country, perspectives and processes.

The increasing popularity of political analysis throughout the development field is based on much of the same overarching challenges faced by the media development community. Even in countries where external media development interventions are tacitly supported by governments, the complex, constantly-evolving political realities that



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Drivers of Political Change in a Media System

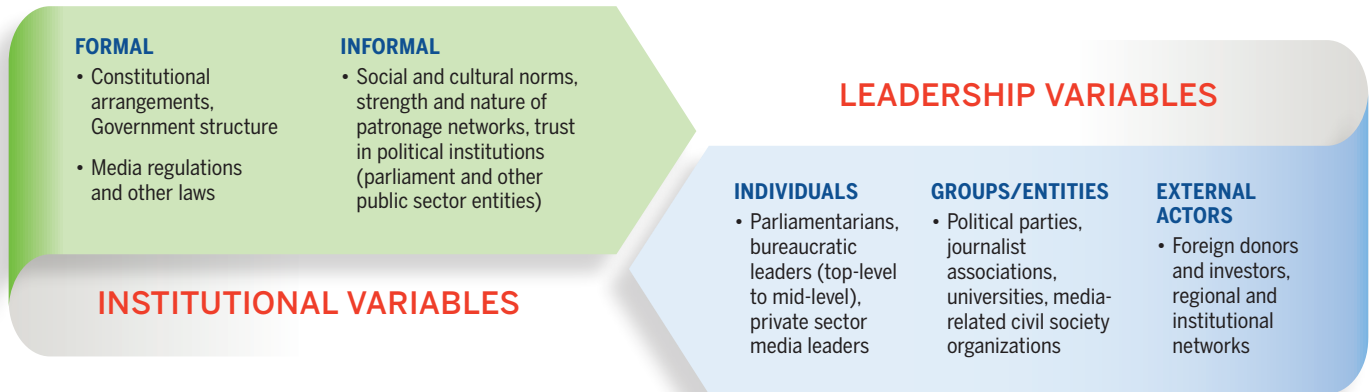


FIGURE 2

help to shape the overall enabling environment pose challenges to effecting positive change in the media environment.

The goal of a political approach to media development is to foster local political ownership of and support for an independent, sustainable, and trusted media sector. Therefore, donors must first understand the key institutional and individual variables in a society that are effecting political change. Understanding these variables and how they interact can give donors and implementers a better sense of the political pressure points on a media system, where points of entry may exist and what kind of change is possible.

While a full explanation of political economy analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, thinking in terms of political variables and how they impact the media sector can be helpful for distilling a storyline and structuring information and analysis to help better inform external actors on points of entry to effect change in the political, and ultimately legal, environment for media.

In order to build political support for media and media development work, media development actors need to have a more sophisticated and holistic understanding of the media system and the political context in which it operates. FIGURE 2 spells out some of the drivers of change in a complex media system, which include institutional and “leadership” variables by which the political and legal environment for media is shaped. Analysis of these variables and how they interact is crucial for identifying drivers of change in the media system. Without such analysis, it is difficult to know what kind of change is possible in a given country’s media system, who the local drivers might be, and how the change might be driven.

Building Political Support for Independent Media: A New Approach, a Long-Term View

The ultimate goal of a political approach to media development is to help build domestic political support for the media as an independent pillar of development and democratic governance. With sufficient political support will come the necessary legal framework that protects an independent and sustainable media sector.

Furthermore, it is the main responsibility of local political leadership, as well as leaders from the private sector and civil society, to effect change in a country's media environment. Thus the role of the donor and implementers is not to try and directly change the environment, but to identify and empower the local leadership to effect the necessary change.¹⁶

Building political support is not a matter of short-term goals. Rather, it is important that media development interventions be designed and implemented with a long-term view. This is precisely because of the ebbs and flows of political conditions in democracies, and particularly in fledgling or immature democracies. By generating political support for media, and helping to strengthen acceptance of media as a pillar of a democratic society, donors will have a better chance of ensuring the long-term viability of media sectors.

In political environments where the short or even medium-term chance for reform is unlikely, there is an understandable tendency among media development practitioners and the broader development community to dismiss the opportunity to effect meaningful change in a media environment. But it is in these societies where a political approach to media development is most important, in the long-term. When political opportunities arise, such as the emergence of new political parties, or a change in government, independent media must be on the agenda. If it is not, media reform risks being left on the sidelines in favor of issues deemed of greater urgency. Donor support can play a crucial role in finding a way to empower political drivers of change to advocate for free media but also seize political opportunities when they arrive.

Seizing Political Opportunities

URUGUAY

Even after military rule ended in Uruguay in 1985, media laws from that era remained intact for decades. Although democratically elected, the ruling party of the country neglected to enact reforms. Beginning in the 1990s, pro-media reform civil society leaders were able to build support among left-wing opposition parties. Because many of these parties emphasized human rights in the post-military government, they were receptive to a media reform agenda as integral to human rights. When the coalition of these parties, the Broad Front, emerged victorious in the 2004 elections, media reform leaders had their golden political opportunity. According to a prominent figure in the media reform push, and current special rapporteur for freedom of expression at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Edison Lanza, "This was our opportunity to say to the Broad Front, here is your chance to pass reforms that you have been talking about for years."¹⁷ In the years since, Uruguay's congress passed landmark legislations on freedom of information, community radio, and a much-touted Audiovisual Communication Services Law.



Building Political Support for Independent Media: Where to Start?

The recommendations below are specifically meant to engage potential drivers of change in the public sector that are too often left out of media development programming. All recommendations are based on two programmatic principles for building political support for media:

Programmatic principles for building political support for media



- **EMPOWERING LOCAL LEADERS**—By empowering local drivers of change, external media development actors stand a better chance of affecting longer-term, locally-owned, media development results, without facing the same level of opposition from local political elites who may seek to vilify the involvement of external actors. Providing space to local drivers such as individual parliamentarians and coalitions enables them to bring about change through local political processes more effectively.¹⁸
- **SOUTH-SOUTH KNOWLEDGE SHARING**—Substantial recent literature concludes that exchanges of information and best practices between developing countries provides a successful method for promoting political and institutional change. At a regional level this can be spurred on by political and national competition, but fundamentally, an exchange between political leaders who face challenges and others who have recently overcome those challenges can be highly valuable.¹⁹

Recommended approaches for engaging the public sector in media development programming include direct engagement of parliamentarians in particular because they are best positioned among public sector officials to effect change in the political and legal environment. Also included are approaches to multi-stakeholder dialogue at national, regional, and global levels that build bridges between potential drivers of change in the public sector with possible allies outside of government.

Engaging Political Leaders in Exchange and Networking

PARLIAMENTARY EXCHANGE: One of the simplest methods for promoting South-South learning among parliamentarians and other political leaders are programs that feature bilateral or multilateral exchanges. Making sure that parliamentarians are well informed on their role in building and maintaining media systems is critical. According to Mitchell O'Brien of the World Bank Institute's Parliamentary Strengthening

Program, “parliamentarians like nothing more than listening to other parliamentarians.”²⁰ Therefore, parliamentary exchanges provide political leaders a useful face-to-face opportunity to learn from peers in countries that have recently experienced similar challenges and those who have achieved successes in reform. For donors and implementers, parliamentary exchanges play an important role in identifying countries that are best suited for an exchange of insight related to free media and media reform, as well as the individual political leaders best positioned to participate.

Exchanges funded by major donors that involve political leaders do frequently take place throughout the world, but these tend to focus on officials from developing countries learning from the practices and experience of developed countries. While these exchanges can be useful, exchanges among “peer countries” in the developing world and among transitioning states are more likely to result in more equitable exchange of shared experience that could prove more relevant to participating leaders.

NETWORKS OF PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR MEDIA: A more ambitious pursuit than exchanges is the development of a parliamentary network dedicated to supporting the principle of an independent, diverse, and free media sector as a cornerstone of democratic development. Parliamentary networks offer a broader opportunity for cross-border knowledge sharing and community-building between political leaders who support independent media.

Parliamentarian networks are not a new concept. Such networks already exist devoted to poverty-reduction, public health and corruption, including the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank & IMF, Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC).

In addition to promoting knowledge-sharing, parliamentary networks, whether on a regional or global scale, provide a high-profile platform to empower political leaders who may struggle to generate attention at the national level to advocate for independent media systems and media reform.

A key challenge for a parliamentary network for media is one that all parliamentary networks face. Parliamentary turnover makes retaining participation rather difficult and requires significant resources and time to coordinate. Based on these challenges, and due to the absence at present of any such parliamentary network focused on media, it may be more useful in the short run to work with existing parliamentary networks to get media development on the agenda as a standalone



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issue. It may also be effective to broaden networks to include other members of government, such as influential bureaucrats and figures in the executive and judicial branches. This would create a broader pool from which to draw participants and engage other segments of government that, in certain political contexts, hold significant power over media reform.

Multi-Stakeholder Media Development Dialogues

NATIONAL MULTI-STAKEHOLDER MEDIA DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUES:

At a national level, providing a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue about the challenges and priorities for the country's media sector is an emerging model for engaging the public sector. Such platforms can raise the visibility of the media as a critical independent sector for the country's development and provide a high-profile opportunity to flesh out challenges and engage political leaders on issues affecting the media environment. It is also a valuable opportunity to build bridges between the public sector and both the private sector and civil society on issues related to media.

Bringing together public sector figures and private sector actors in particular could prove valuable, according to Djordjija Petkovski, professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Business School. Petkovski suggests that "a major failing of media development work is the lack of private sector engagement... the connection between the public sector and the private sector could provide good enough support for reform-minded public sector leaders" to build political influence for reform.²¹

Media development dialogues need to focus on local ownership. Instead of organizing and managing these events, donors and implementers should provide support, via funding and technical assistance, to local actors in the development of such dialogues. Local ownership needs to drive the planning from early on through the project. A failure to do so can delegitimize the event and worsen relations between various stakeholders.

Indeed, a recent example of a media development dialogue in Myanmar has come under significant criticism from local actors and other observers for being primarily the work of outside media development actors and the host country's ministry of information. Although civil society, private media companies and other stakeholders were invited and participated, they had little role in the planning of the conference. When the government and outsiders organize these events without



At a national level, providing a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue about the challenges and priorities for the country's media sector is an emerging model for engaging the public sector.

significant consultation with other stakeholders there is a tendency, especially in emerging and fragile democracies, for governments to capture the agenda in its entirety.

With local ownership and external financial support and expertise, media development dialogues can provide a highly valuable venue for national dialogue between the government, private sector, and civil society together to build alliances, discuss structural and institutional challenges to the media environment, and consider solutions to these problems.

GLOBAL MULTI-STAKEHOLDER MEDIA DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUES:

Although myriad global forums, summits, and conferences focused on media and media development already exist, most of these are held by developed countries and major donors to identify latest trends and priorities from the donor perspective. In line with this paper's emphasis on host country driven media development, global dialogues focused on multi-stakeholder media development issues with significant engagement of political leaders should be held in developing countries. These dialogues, with strong public sector participation would provide a prominent platform for engagement between political leaders and non-governmental stakeholders, who are often left out of the conversation, to discuss challenges and opportunities for building independent media systems.

The events should feature developing country policy-makers, media actors, private sector leaders, NGO's, academics, and other experts with a focus on approaches to more effective locally-driven, effective, and long-term media development. In addition, these meetings should cover how donors can best use their resources to support local political leaders and processes of change to help shape enabling environments for media.

Indeed, these global dialogues could also present an opportunity for knowledge-sharing between leaders in the public sector, private sector, and civil society on how to build political support for independent media and how to build alliances to help influence the political agenda on media.

Global dialogues of this nature may best be designed to cover a particular geographic region. Latin America is an example of a region where common language, regional competition, and shared histories may provide greater reinforcement to the cross-border exchange of ideas and experience. Similarly, Francophone African countries and member states of the Commonwealth share historical and governance similarities that may lend themselves to effective cross-border



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Dialogues with strong public sector participation would provide a prominent platform for engagement between political leaders and non-governmental stakeholders, who are often left out of the conversation, to discuss challenges and opportunities for building independent media systems.

dialogues. Regions like Southeast Asia, with its diverse cultures, histories, and languages may seem like a challenging environment for such exchange. However, the Association of South East Asian Nations' recent push for greater regional integration and collaboration may present an opportunity for a regional dialogue focused on widening the space for media in a region plagued by repressive media policies.



The final recommendation is for greater support for domestic coalition-building, perhaps the most impactful and long-term approach to engaging the public sector and reshaping the political environment for media.

Supporting Domestic Coalitions for Media Reform

The final recommendation of this paper is for greater support for domestic coalition-building, perhaps the most impactful and long-term approach to engaging the public sector and reshaping the political environment for media. Media movements, as described by Professor Silvio Waisbord of the George Washington University, are a cross-section of civil society groups that use advocacy and legislative mechanisms to push for “a broad set of civic initiatives to transform media structures, practices, and content” through collective action.”^{22, 23}

Perhaps the most compelling example of a media movement coalition is in Uruguay, where a diverse array of organizations, as well as institutions such as universities, worked together in a broad-based effort to identify reform priorities and build political support, with the ultimate goal of effecting change in the legal environment for media. By strategically selecting priority issues that most easily attracted public support, such as community radio and access to information, the media movement in Uruguay was able to attract enough political support to pass several key media reforms that have helped create one of Latin America’s most progressive media environments.²⁴

Although Uruguay was successful, external support for media movement coalitions is the most ambitious of the recommendations outlined in this paper. Media coalitions are challenging for external actors to support because they can be loosely-knit and encompass a wide range of actors. In addition, unifying a diversity of disparate interests can be very challenging. But if donors could develop a more sophisticated understanding of the institutions and individuals driving change in a country’s media system and bring these players to the table, donors could help build domestic momentum for cross-sector, multi-stakeholder movements for lasting change in developing countries.

Conclusion

Media systems hold unique power in society, and the temptation is strong for political and economic elites in developing or immature democracies to capture and pervert the media to further their own interests. But it is because of this political threat to media systems that it is crucial for the media development community to better understand the importance that political support from the public sector plays in building free, independent, and sustainable media systems.

The ultimate goal of a political approach to media development is to help create an enabling political and legal environment for media that allows independent media outlets, journalists, and other actors to operate freely and with equitable access to finance and information. But beyond the laws and institutions that are required to safeguard such an environment, a political approach to media development is meant to help local actors build broad-based political support among public sector leaders. Instead of treating the public sector as a monolithic obstacle to progress in the media space, it is time to engage potential drivers of change in the public sector and help build bridges between them and leaders in the private sector and civil society who demand a free and independent media.



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Endnotes

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- ¹⁷ Interview with the author
- ¹⁸ Mark Nelson and Tara Susman-Pena
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